



Ride Free Area update

The Ride Free Area (RFA) for transit in downtown Seattle is scheduled to end on Sept. 29, 2012. Beginning then, bus riders will pay when they enter the bus for all trips. These changes will help King County Metro Transit save money, preserve bus service, and make fare payment and passenger boarding the same throughout the transit system.

Community Transit will make the same changes. Sound Transit is considering similar changes to align with Metro and Community Transit operations in downtown Seattle.

Metro is drafting an implementation plan for making these changes, and is working with Sound Transit, Community Transit, and the city of Seattle. The plan has three parts: bus operations; communications; and transportation assistance for people with little or no income who now use the Ride Free Area.

Background on the Ride Free Area

The Ride Free Area in downtown Seattle began in September 1973 as a partnership between Metro and the city of Seattle to support retailers, encourage transit use, and speed up bus boarding in the more congested central business district. The city has subsidized some of the cost of operating the Ride Free Area, but that subsidy has not been adjusted in several years to account for changes in operating costs, ridership, and resulting fare revenue lost by Metro. Other transit agencies that operate in downtown Seattle have honored the Ride Free Area, although they receive no subsidy for lost revenue.

Last summer, the Metropolitan King County Council approved a two-year \$20 Congestion Reduction Charge to preserve Metro service. It also directed Metro to eliminate the Ride Free Area or negotiate a new agreement with the city to cover the cost of operation. This is not possible, because the city's budget is shrinking rather than growing. So, Metro is proceeding with ending the Ride Free Area.

As the RFA is eliminated, Metro will move to a pay-on-entry system for all bus trips to be consistent with current pay-on-entry practices outside the downtown area. It will be less confusing for riders to always pay when they enter the bus. All passengers will enter through the front door and be encouraged to exit through the rear doors whenever possible to streamline boarding.



What do you think?

Please help us by commenting on the different issues associated with ending the Ride Free Area, and give us suggestions you would like us to consider that will keep buses and people moving through downtown Seattle. We want to know how these changes might affect you, your neighbors, your employees, and anyone who uses public transportation.

Smooth transit operations in downtown Seattle

Ending the Ride Free Area in downtown Seattle and asking passengers to pay when they enter could slow down boarding, especially at busy downtown Seattle bus stops. The best way to speed up boarding is to increase the use of ORCA cards for electronic fare payment. Here are some other ideas to keep things moving:

Surface streets

- Extend length of some bus stops to hold more buses
- Work with Seattle to revise street signals to keep buses and traffic moving
- Change bus routing to make transit turns safer and easier

Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel

- Move one or more tunnel bus routes to surface streets
- Group buses entering the tunnel by their bay location
- Have buses that are mostly dropping off passengers pull far forward to the end of the tunnel platform
- Extend the length of some bays to hold more buses
- Explore the use of portable fare-payment machines

Changes in boarding and exiting the bus

- All riders will board at the front door and be encouraged to exit at the rear
- People who use wheelchairs or have mobility issues can still exit at the front door
- People who have loaded a bike on the rack can still exit at the front door
- RapidRide passengers who have paid off board at a station can enter through any door
- Community Transit morning commuters may exit from any door

Tell us what you think

Will this change how you use the bus?

Do you have an idea to minimize delays for bus boarding in downtown Seattle?

Do you have a suggestion on which tunnel bus routes should move to the surface?

Clear communications

We need to make sure everyone knows that the Ride Free Area is going away and that they will pay when they enter for all bus trips. Starting with a public open house on March 29, Metro and its partners are planning a six-month campaign to educate bus riders about the changes. This will include:

- Signs on buses and at bus stops and transit centers
- Updates on the Metro, Sound Transit, and Community Transit websites
- Information in the summer and fall transit service change materials
- E-mail and text message Transit Alerts sent to subscribers
- Notifications to tourist and visitor groups, and updates to the Metro visitor's guide
- Outreach to other transportation agencies, human services organizations, community groups, and employer networks
- Encouraging the use of ORCA cards to speed up boarding

Transportation assistance for people with little or no income

When the Ride Free Area goes away, some people will lose the free bus ride they now use to reach healthcare, food banks, job training, and other essential services. Metro and Seattle are working with human service agencies on possible options.

Currently, the county has a program that sells agencies deeply discounted bus tickets that they can distribute to their clients. Approximately 1.1 million of these tickets were distributed in 2011.

The following ideas are being discussed as ways to assist people with little or no income once the Ride Free Area ends:

- Increase the number of human service tickets provided to the agencies
- Operate a free circulator
- Donate vehicles to agencies to run their own transportation programs

Tell us what you think

What's the best way to get information to you about transit service changes?

What do riders need to know to speed up bus boarding?

If you don't currently have an ORCA card, what would encourage you to get one?

Tell us what you think

When the Ride Free Area goes away, will it increase or decrease your use of the bus in downtown Seattle?

If you depend on free downtown bus service, where do you currently ride to most often?

If there is a free circulator in the future, where should it go?



Learn more and stay in touch

Ride Free Area project

Website: www.kingcounty.gov/metro/howtoride

Email us: community.relations@kingcounty.gov

Phone: 206-296-7643

206-263-9988 (Español)

206-263-9674 (Tiếng Việt)

General information



King County Metro Transit

www.kingcounty.gov

206-553-3000

Sign up for Transit Alerts: www.kingcounty.gov/metro/alerts



Sound Transit

www.soundtransit.org

888-889-6368

Sign up for Rider Alerts: www.soundtransit.org/alerts



Community Transit

www.communitytransit.org

425-353-RIDE (7433)

Sign up for Rider Alerts: www.communitytransit.org/subscribe



City of Seattle

www.seattle.gov

206-684-CITY (2489)

Alternative Formats Available

206-684-1151 TTY Relay: 711

12019/comm 1202M



Interpreter

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